More thermal scanners pushed

It is still important to improve the detection measures of all the major public and private establishments in the country in order to prevent the spread of this health menace

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In a bid to further contain the spread of the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) virus, a lawmaker has filed a resolution urging all owners of major public and private establishments to install thermal scanners for easy detection of potential carriers.

In House Resolution 706, Quezon City 2nd District Rep. Precious Hipolito Castelo said that while the mortality rate of COVID-19 seems to be lower than that of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome or SARS, it is still important to improve the detection measures of all the major public and private establishments in the country to prevent the spread of the menace.

"Now, therefore, be it resolved by the House of Representatives to urge all major public and private establishments to install thermal scanners in order to detect any potential carrier of the 2019 novel coronavirus," the resolution states. The confirmed cases of coronavirus in the country remains at three, with one death while death tolls in the neighboring countries, especially China continue to soar prompting government officials to impose travel restrictions. However, Malacañang yesterday announced that travel ban on Taiwan has been lifted, a move that was seen by many as a response to Taiwan's stern warning that it will "reciprocate."

Not pressured

Health Secretary Francisco Duque III, however reiterated Friday that the country was not pressured by Taiwan's threat to suspend the visa-free entry privileges for Filipinos.

The Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Disease' (IATF) has resolved to lift travel restrictions on the island nation effective yesterday.

But the Health secretary maintains that the lifting of the ban has nothing to do with Taiwan's sullen banter.

"That has nothing to do with it," Duque told reporters during a press briefing. On our part, it is purely on public health, public safety, and of course the need to see whether there is a threat of increase risk if we didn't allow travel from Taiwan to the Philippines," he explained.

Earlier, Presidential Communications Secretary Martin Andanar said the IATF signed Resolution 45 recommending the immediate lifting of the travel ban to Taiwan.

He said the IATF has received communications and information pertaining to strict protocols that Taiwan has established, which enable the Philippines to credibly determine whether any traveler has come from mainland China and its Special Administrative Regions.

Upon independently verifying the subject protocols, the IATF is convinced that the protocols provide reliable assurance that sufficient measures are in place to effectively prevent potential carriers of the disease from entering or departing Taiwan.

He added that the IATF is continuously monitoring several risk indicators and protocols from other jurisdictions such as Macau, with a view to modifying the current travel restrictions if considerations of public health will warrant.

Duque said for the Department of Health's recommendation, two things come to fore — the absence of local transmission in Taiwan and the low volume of travelers from Taiwan to Manila which as of February of this year just reached 45,000

At the same time, Duque said that the travel ban in Taiwan is not permanent and can be lifted if the need arises.

"We have said from the very start that this will be subjected to risk assessment. And this has been a temporary ban to begin with so there has never been a decision of the IATF that has been cast in stone. So we continue with the same tact of subjecting the issue of travel restrictions or bans to periodic assessment," he added.

Duque said the Manila Economic Cultural Office has already been informed of the lifting of the travel ban.

Meanwhile, Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat, said with the lifting of the travel ban, Filipinos who wish to visit or work in Taiwan can freely do so.

Taiwan, she pointed out, is also an important market when it comes to tourism.

"This is very important to all our tourism stakeholders. They are our fifth largest source market and a lot transits via Taiwan. And as we discussed earlier, stricter protocols were imposed by Taiwan as well so it is safe," Puyat said.

Over at Congress, House Minority Leader Bienvenido Abante Jr., lauded the government's decision to lift the travel ban.